



# Department of Justice

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Eastern District of California

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## **\$1.4 MILLION IN CASH CONFISCATED IN BAKERSFIELD DRUG BUST**

FRESNO, Calif.—United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Special Agent-in-Charge Javier F. Peña, and Kern County Sheriff Donny Youngblood announced today the arrests and filing of federal charges against SOKHA BHOPAL, of Valencia, Calif., VATH LIM, of El Monte, Calif., THAI HOANG NGUYEN, of Suray, British Columbia, Canada, and DAVINDEI SINGH, of Delata, British Columbia, Canada, for conspiring to purchase and then resell 85 kilograms, or about 187 pounds, of cocaine. Approximately \$1.4 million in cash was seized by DEA agents after BHOPAL, LIM, NGUYEN, and SINGH brought it to a drug deal to pay for the cocaine; the cash is subject to forfeiture.

This case is the product of a joint investigation by the Bakersfield DEA and Kern County Sheriff's Department with assistance from the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

According to Assistant United States Attorney Karen A. Escobar, who is prosecuting the case, the criminal complaint filed in federal court states that on September 18, 2008, BHOPAL negotiated with an undercover officer for the purchase of 85 kilograms of cocaine. The undercover officer then showed BHOPAL, NGUYEN, and SINGH multiple kilograms of cocaine, which he indicated was available for purchase. The next day BHOPAL, NGUYEN, SINGH, and LIM delivered a large, black suitcase containing \$1.4 million to the undercover officer to pay for the 85 kilograms of cocaine.

The Bakersfield DEA and Kern County Sheriff's Office seized nearly \$900,000 in a similar operation involving different suspects conducted three months ago, bringing the total amount of drug monies seized by the two agencies to over \$2 million.

"Cash is the lifeline of every drug trafficking organization," stated DEA Special Agent in Charge Javier F. Peña. "If you take away their cash, you effectively cripple the flow of drugs."

Sheriff Youngblood added, "The Kern County Sheriff's Department is committed to employing a multi-jurisdictional strategy to target and remove major drug traffickers from our community."

United States Attorney Scott stated, "Complete cooperation among federal and local law enforcement partners made it possible to dismantle this high-level drug dealing organization."

Conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute cocaine carries a mandatory minimum prison term of 10 years and a maximum of life, along with a maximum fine of \$4 million. The actual sentence, however, will be determined at the discretion of the court after consideration of the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of variables and any applicable statutory sentencing factors.

The charges are only allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

At their arraignment today before a U.S. Magistrate Judge in Bakersfield, BHOPAL, NGUYEN, SINGH, and LIM were ordered detained. The next court dates will be before U.S. Magistrate Judges in Fresno: a detention hearing on September, 24, 2008 and a preliminary hearing on October 6, 2008.

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